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SUBJECT: GREECE: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION ON KOSOVO INDEPENDENCE

¶1. Summary and Introduction: News of Kosovo's declaration of independence this weekend arrived during a rare heavy snowfall in Athens, simultaneous with surprising results from the elections in Cyprus and just ahead of another round of negotiations on the Macedonia name issue. In this heavy environment, the Greek media has been reporting regularly and factually on developments in Pristina and Belgrade, giving roughly equal prominence to images of Kosovar Albanians waving American and Albanian flags as they celebrated, and to pictures of Serbians burning the blue and yellow flag of the new state the following day. Reports are giving roughly equal time to the EU's "split" on the matter, U.S. recognition, and Russia's positions. Alongside a moderate amount of what we would characterize as cautiously apprehensive analysis and commentary, Ambassador Speckhard's op-ed entitled "A Better Future for Kosovo...and its Neighbors" appeared in independent, influential Kathimerini on Sunday.

¶2. As usual, depending on their partisan affiliations, major newspapers' headlines reflect Greek positions articulated Monday by Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis after the special E Ministerial in Brussels, or PASOK leader George Papandreou during a meeting of the opposition party's Political Coordinating Council. Bakoyannis said among other things that Greece would decide on Kosovo's recognition "at a later stage," and stressed the need for stability. She also indicated Greece would participate in the EU force. Papandreou reportedly said, according to two major papers, that Greece should not recognize Kosovo, and expressed concern about the consequences of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. End Summary and Introduction.

¶3. Indicative, locally-produced news analysis and commentary were as follows. No lead editorials have appeared so far.

¶A. To Vima (centrist, opposition) front-page lead headline: "Commotion in the Balkans: The Phantom of 'the danger from the North'...The Skopje and the Kosovo Dominos. PM Karamanlis Mulling over All-Party Leadership Meeting. EU is Split, Russia's Reaction." Text: "The phantom of the 'danger from the North' is revisiting the Balkans, fueling concern in Greece. This time it does not take the form of the Warsaw Pact, but of the instability that is generated by the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence and the lingering issue of the name for Skopje. Greek diplomacy faces crucial decisions."

In a separate story, To Vima reports that PM Karamanlis and German Chancellor Merkel had a telephone conversation last Saturday on Kosovo and the policy the EU should follow. Merkel, who telephoned Karamanlis, the paper says, informed him "of her government's decision not to recognize Kosovo immediately. Karamanlis told Merkel the Greek government would not rush to take any decisions in anticipation of the EU Summit of March 14."

¶B. Kathimerini (influential, independent) front-page story above the fold: "EU Split over Kosovo. U.S. Recognizes it Formally; Russia, China Disagree." Text: "While American President Bush reaffirmed his support for Kosovo's independence and Secretary of State Rice later announced the creation of a new state, Pristina's unilateral act divides the EU and the UN. Turkey rushed to recognize Kosovo

yesterday ... Russia and China voiced their strong concern, underlining the division at the Security Council." The paper continues with reporting from its Moscow correspondent Achilleas Patsoukas under the title: "Moscow Enraged, Warns of Domino Effect."

In a commentary entitled "Dangerous Precedent," Kathimerini senior analyst Stavros Lygeros writes: "The decision on Kosovo's unilateral declaration was taken by Washington last spring. It was taken when it was made clear that the Ahtisaari Plan had no chance of being ratified by the Security Council because of the Russian veto. Initially, Americans believed Moscow was negotiating in order to secure tradeoffs on other fronts. When they realized their mistake they turned to deviating from international legality ... Countries with minorities and with irredentist movements justifiably believe that Kosovo's recognition paves a dangerous way. Their turn may come one day ... This issue concerns Hellenism directly. Sooner or later Kosovo's independence will be used as a pretext for the recognition of the Cypriot fake state. However, Turkey is not positioned to win. It is also positioned to lose because of the Kosovo precedent. The latter facilitates the creation of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and provides the legal basis for the irredentist views of Kurds in Turkey."

In a different commentary entitled "American Insistence," Professor Thanos Veremis also says in Kathimerini: "Kosovo's independence was expected. What is impressive is the American insistence that Kosovars' self-determination is a unique case among the plethora of relevant requests put forth by similar entities. One of the reasons that makes America's commitment to Kosovo's independence problematic is that it provokes Russia's Putin to again take on the Great Power role in the Balkans ... Russian fears that stem primarily from the emancipation of Chechnya may be confirmed also in the case of Republica Srpska ... Greece has adopted a wait-and-see stance in view of Nimetz's final proposal [on the Macedonia name issue]. If

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the solution is satisfactory, and the American support obvious, then Greece may join the EU countries that will recognize Kosovo ... The question of why the USG insists on this issue [Kosovo] remains unanswered. If it is a quid pro quo with the Middle East Muslims, then Mr. Bush has added one more rash action to the many he has already committed."

1C. Eleftherotypia (left-of-center, opposition) headlines: "EU Recognitions at ill." The paper also prints its Moscow correspondent Thanassis Avgherinos's dispatch entitled: "Russia Threatens to Recognize Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transdniestria." In commentary, a Deutsche Welle editorial entitled "Centrifugal Forces" appears, concluding: "Only when borders are abolished and Serbia and Kosovo are equal EU members will stability and peace prevail in the region. There is a long way to get there."

1D. Ethnos (left-of-center, opposition) has a two-page spread inside headline: "Bush Gives the Signal for a Barrage of Recognitions, While Moscow Fights for Kosovo at the UN." The spread includes a picture of Kosovar Albanians holding a banner that reads: "Without Kosovo and Chameria there is no Albania - Independence to Kosovo." The caption reads in part: "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence feeds extreme elements, threatening stability in the entire region. The scene with the banner traveled all over the world through CNN."

1E. Eleftheros Typos (centrist) carries a story headlined: "Concern over a Separatist Domino." In an accompanying story, the paper says: "The specter of [recognition of] the fake state in [northern] Cyprus prompted by the statements of Russians and Serbs, in tandem with Ankara's policy that engenders separatist trends in Thrace, forces Athens to adopt a wait-and-see stance. Athens will keep its cards close for as long as it takes, but as diplomatic sources have affirmed, it will not vindicate the expectation of Belgrade that would like support from the Karamanlis government."

SPECKHARD